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## Lawmaker's defense of internment called 'preposterous' and 'ignorant'

By Cecilia Kang  
Mercury News

Comments by a North Carolina congressman that he agreed with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II sparked outrage Wednesday by San Jose Rep. Mike Honda and Bay Area Japanese and Arab Americans.

Rep. Howard Coble, R-N.C., who heads a homeland security subcommittee, made the comments Tuesday on a radio call-in program when a listener suggested that Arabs in the United States be confined.

Some Japanese-Americans "probably were intent on doing harm to us," Coble said, "just as some of these Arab Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

Honda, who as a child spent time in a Colorado internment camp, called Coble's remarks "preposterous" and said he spoke with Coble on Wednesday to learn more about his views.

"The need for raising awareness of this shameful chapter in U.S. history is more apparent than ever," Honda said in a statement.

Coble could not be reached for comment.

Japanese-American and Arab and Muslim groups demanded an apology and explanation from Coble.

Helal Omeira, executive director of the Northern California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said Coble's views are cause for concern in light of recent events.

The national GOP is still recovering from the statements by Mississippi Sen. Trent Lott that suggested he supported segregation -- remarks that led to his resignation as Senate Republican leader. And last month a prominent Californian Republican, Bill Black, apologized for having distributed an article lamenting the outcome of the Civil War.

"These comments are obviously very ignorant and misinformed," Omeira said of Coble's comments. He said the internment of Japanese-Americans has "already been deemed unconstitutional and un-American."

Though Coble said he did not agree with the caller on the radio show, he said he agreed with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's establishment of internment camps for Japanese-Americans.

"We were at war," Coble said, calling Japanese-Americans "an endangered species." Coble, who is chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, added that "for many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street."

Honda balked at Coble's suggestion that the U.S. government had safety in mind when it created the internment camps.

"If we were incarcerated for our safety, why were we inside the barbed wire fences, and why were the gun towers facing us?" Honda asked.

Coble made similar remarks about internment camps in 1988, when he voted against paying reparations and extending a national apology to Japanese-Americans interned during World War II.

For Japanese-Americans, Coble's comments this week reopened old wounds.

San Jose resident Jimi Yamaichi said such views are dangerous and could be used against Arabs and Muslims in the United States.

"It's really scary to hear these kinds of comments because he can twist people's arms into treating Muslims unfairly," said Yamaichi, 80, whose family of 11 lived in the Heart Mountain, Wyo., relocation center and Tule Lake internment camp from 1942 to 1946.

On Wednesday, Honda introduced a resolution in Congress that would recognize Feb. 19 as a "Day of Remembrance" for the signing of the executive order that led to the forced internment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans.

"Today, our country is again in a time of war," Honda said. "It is important for us all to realize that gross violations of civil liberties and disregard for constitutional rights are always a possibility if we are not vigilant."

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